Unfruitful HEARERS Detected & Warned: OR A Diſcourſe

Wherein the Danger of, and by, Unprofitable *Hearing*, is laid open and Cautioned againſt. As it was delivered in the Courſe of his Miniſtry;

By Mr. Nehemiah Walter, Paſtor of the Church in *Roxborough*.

Publiſhed by ſome of the Hearers.

Ezek. 2.7. *And thou ſhalt ſpeak my words unto them, whether they will Hear, or whether they will forbear.*

Luk 8.18 *Take heed therefore how you hear.*

Boſton, Printed by *B. Green*, & *J. Allen*, Sold by *Michael Perry*, at his Shop under the Weſt End of the Town Houſe. 1696.

HAC
COLL
LIB

1853 April 5. Inst of
Richard L. Pease Esq
of Edgartown
Pro Benjamin Savage
of Boston

Christian READER,

AS it is the greatest, & most Distinguishing outward favour, that God bestows on any People, to give them his Word & Ordinances, Psal. 147. 19, 20. So it must needs be the most Heinous Provocation offered to the God of Heaven, to slight or despise this Privilege, & Consequently will procure for them that so do, the sorest Punishments, according to, Joh. 15. 22. Math. 11. 21, &c. That all, who enjoy the best & clearest dispensation of the Gospel, do not Profit by it, is evident, both by the Parable of the Sower, Math. 13. begin. In which there are four sorts of hearers, & but one of them is the better by it; & by the frequent Observation of the Apostasy and Degeneracy of men, though the Ordinances continue in their Light & Purity among them, as it was with Ephesus, Rev. 2. begin. And no wonder, since there is an imbred Unbelief of, & Prejudice at the word of God, in all men naturally, which nothing but his mighty Grace can subdue. And it is observable, that this Unprofitableness is wont to steal upon men by degrees, and they are not aware of it, while they make a great noise, and flourishing show of a plausible Profession, having a name to live, and yet are dead, as Sardis, Rev. 3. 1. There is therefore great need for Gods faithful Servants, to be often by way of Caution, and frequently by way of Conviction, calling upon their Hearers, to see to themselves, and rouse them up from their sloth on this Account. And doubtless, these Churches in N. E. have as much need as any in the World, of being closely [illegible] on this Account. How rich a Price we have had in our Hands to get Wisdom, by Occasion of the free & faithful Preaching of the Word among us, must be Confessed, with admira-

tion at the singular kindness of God in it: but if the frame of Spirit, and Conversation of this People be observed, it will too notoriously say, that we have too generally been those fools that have not an heart to it. And is it not time to rouse up to the Consideration of it, when God *is walking through the Land in a course of Judgment, to the procuring of which this Sin hath had a great Share.*

The Reverend Author *of the ensuing* Sermons, *had this much upon his heart, & was accordingly stirred up by God, to do the part of a* Faithful Watchman, *in giving his* Flock *Solemn warning of it; which it pleased the* Lord of the Harvest *to follow so with his Blessing, as to affect the hearts of divers of his* Hearers *therewith, and to excite some of them to desire the Publication of them, for the more Common benefit of a People equally concerned; which they obtained, though not without reluctancy of Spirit in him, who entertained a* Modest & Undervaluing *Opinion of himself, & his own Labours. For my part, I must Profess, that I look upon it to be a* Word in Season, *& never more needed, than in this day of carnal security, & vain confidence in the* Temple of the Lord, *while men little regard how they live up to the Truths that are constantly urged on them; and do heartily bless God, that he raiseth up such* Labourers *in his* Vineyard, *& pray that he will still go on to bless us with such* Plants, *that may be for a Succession in the room of those whom he is* Transplanting *into his* Heavenly Kingdom. *And that the* Following Discourse *may be one help to recover us to our* First Love *& help us to* Strengthen the Things that are ready to dy, *& accordingly be* Words of Life *to all that Read them, I commend both it & you to his Blessing, who Teacheth us to Profit,* Who am, The least, & most Unworthy of Ministers, S. WILLARD.

Unfruitful HEARERS Detected & Warned:

Heb. 4. 2.

The Word Preached did not Profit them.

THE Scriptures are not only *Doctrinal*, but also *Historical*; they contain matters of *Fact*, as well as Articles of *Faith*. Amongst the many matters of Fact Recorded, the Evils Committed, and the Evils Suffered by the People of God, are none of the fewest; their sins and punishments stand upon Record, and are handed down to Succeeding Generations: One great Design of God in Transmitting them to After ages is, that men might be Warned against falling into the like sins, least they

fall under a like Dispensation of Wrath; this is the declared end of God in penning down the Sin and Destruction of the *Israelites* in the Wilderness, 1 Cor. 10. 11. *All these things happened unto them for Ensamples and they are written for our Admonition, upon whom the Ends of the World are come.* The Apostle *Paul*, in complyance with this Design of God, makes a Practical Improvement of the *Israelites* Unbelief and Exclusion from the Rest of God, in this Chapter, wherein is our *Text*, & the preceding; he tells us that the People of *Israel* had a Promise of Rest given unto them, but by reason of their Unbelief, they Entred not thereinto: He also tells us, That the same Promise of Rest given to them, is likewise given to us; and therefore cautions us against falling after their Example of Unbelief. That we have the Promise of Gods Rest remaining to us under the New Testament, the Apostle proves, from our being Gospelized as well as they; the same *Gospel* that was Preached unto them, is Preached unto us; and consequently all the Promises of Spiritual and Eternal Rest appertaining thereunto, are given unto us.

In the managing of this Argument, the Apostle takes occasion, for our solemn Admonition, to set before us the ineffectual-

ness

ness of the Gospel Preached unto the *Israelites*, but says he, *The Word Preached did not Profit them.*

In the Text two things are affirmed concerning the *Israelites* in the Wilderness.

1. *That the Word was Preached unto them.* In the Greek 'tis, The *Word* of *Hearing*; that is, the Word Dispensed unto the Sense of Hearing, besides a Typical Declaration of the Word to the Eye; they had also an Oral Declaration of it to the Ear; *The Word was Preached unto them.* This Word, was the Word of Reconciliation and Salvation, the Gospel of Grace. *Moses* was not only a *Law giver*, but an *Evangelist*; he Preached the Gospel to them as well as the Law; both were tempered together, although the Law was the chief Ingredient. In the Prophecies of *Moses*, and his other Occasional Discourses, Jesus Christ and his Doctrines of the Gospel are very obvious and manifest. *Christ* and his *Apostles* Preached no new Doctrines, but the very same which were of old Preached by *Moses* and the *Prophets*, unto whose Writings they do alwayes appeal for the vindicating their Doctrines from the Charge of Novelty; the same Gospel as to the Substance, was Preached to them, which is Preached to us; indeed it is more clearly,

distinctly and fully Dispensed to us, then to them: however they heard the glad tidings and joyful sound as well as we: the way in which we go to Heaven, was the *good old way*, in which the Saints formerly went to Glory.

2. *That this Word Preached did not Profit them*: this is not to be understood concerning them all, but a very great part of them; some did profit by it, *Chap.* 3. 16. but the generality did Reap no saving benefit thereby; the Word Preached did not become *The power of God unto Salvation*: They heard it, but to no Spiritual Advantage.

DOCTRINE.

Many that Hear the Word Preached are not Profited thereby.

Two PROPOSITIONS.

PROPOSITION I. *The Word Preached is an Ordinance for Spiritual Profit.* Some look upon Preaching as a needless work, and the occasion of more mischief than benefit. God however in his Infinite Wisdom has seen it needful to Establish the Ministry in his Church through all Ages: under the Old Testament, God appointed men to Expound and Apply the Law unto the

the People: Under the New Testament, *Jesus Christ* has appointed the *Ministry* of the Word, to be a Standing Ordinance in his Church unto the End of the World, and therefore has given a Promise of his perpetual Presence with it, Math. 28. 19,20. *Go Teach all Nations... And lo I am with you to the End of the World.* God and Christ have counted the Preaching the Word useful; and experience showes how needful it is to preserve, not only the life and power, but also the very being of Religion in a place; without Controversy, the Word of God purely and faithfully Dispensed in the Ministry, is very Soul profiting.

It is Profitable to Sinners and to Saints.

1. *To Sinners.* Unto them it is many wayes profitable.

1. *It is Profitable for Instruction.*

The Ignorant are hereby Instructed in what they are to know, believe, expect & do. Many Blind Eyes have been opened, many Dark Minds Enlightned, many Foolish Souls made wise to Salvation by the Ministry; the Apostle *Paul* as a Preacher, was sent to *Open mens eyes, and to turn them*

from Darkness to Light, Acts 26. 17, 18. and how wonderfully was the knowledge of Christ spread over the face of the Earth by the Ministry of the Apostles? through their Preaching, the Clouds of thick Darkness which hung over the Gentile World, were soon dispelled and scattered: and ever since the *Apostles*, God in his Providence has ordinarily brought Light into the World by Gospel Ministers; by them he usually propagates and maintains the knowledge of Salvation. Hence in Scripture, Ministers are called *Teachers*, because they are appointed to teach the good knowledge of God: They are also called *Lights*, because they are set up by God to Enlighten the Dark World.

2. *It is Profitable for Conviction.* The Spirit of God by the Preaching of the Word convinces Sinners both of their Sinfulness and Misery.

(1.) *Of their Sinfulness.* Sinners are great Selfflatterers, and therefore 'tis one of the hardest things in the World to Convince them of their Sinfulness and guiltiness before God. The Word of God however, when closely applyed, and set home upon Consciences, has a convincing power, which many times the Sinner cannot resist; he is constrained to fall before the force of Gods

Word,

Word, and to cry out, *Guilty, Guilty!* The Word is therefore compared to a *Sword*, which opens the Ulcer, and lets out the Corruption, that the Sinner is sensibly convinced of his filthiness: many have thought themselves whole and clean, until the Word Preached has shown them their great unsoundness and pollution; the Jews thought they had committed no fault in Crucifying Christ; but when *Peter* in his Sermon, charged this Sin upon their Consciences, *They were pricked at the heart, and cryed out, What shall we do?* Acts 2. 37. The Spear with which they pierced Christ, now pierced their very Souls; they acknowledge themselves guilty of his blood; many times in a Sermon the Minister layes his finger upon the Sore, and the Sinner is touched to the quick, & says, *I am the man.*

(2.) *Of their Misery.* The Natural Estate of Sinners, is a lost, undone and perishing Estate; and yet 'tis seldome they are sensible of it. Oftentimes they think themselves in a good and safe Estate, when they are in a very sad and dangerous condition. Now, it pleases God, by the Word Preached, to come in upon their Hearts, & shew them their danger: As they are really Lost, so he makes them sensibly Lost, that they cry out, *What must we do to be Saved?*

They

They are brought to see their need of a Saviour.

3. *It is Profitable for Awakening.* Security is the general frame of Sinners: They Sleep quietly in their Sins, without any fear of Wrath, or care about their Salvation. Many times, God by the *Hammer* of his Word, raps at the door of their Hearts, and awakes them out of their Sleep; the Voice of God by the Preacher, rouzes them out of their Security; they cannot lye still upon their Bed of Sloth as before; the Threatnings of the Lord solemnly Denounced in their Hearing, and the Flashes of *Sinai* before their eyes, strike a dread upon their Consciences. When *Paul* Preached to *Fælix*, about *Temperance, Righteousness, and Judgment to come*, that Intemperate and Unjust Person, *Trembled*, Acts 24. 25. His Soul was startled, in a very fright and agony. How often are Secure, Drowzy Sinners Alarmed by the Word, so far as to look about, and bestir themselves in the business of their Salvation? Conscience Awakened by the Word, oftentimes works an External and Partial Reformation.

4. *'Tis Profitable for Conversion.* The Word Preached is the usual means of Conversion; by that God commonly Softens the hard Hearts, and Changes the Natures

of

of Sinners: Three Thousand were Converted by one Sermon which *Peter* Preached, Acts 2. 41. This was a more notable and illustrious work, than all the Miracles wrought by the Apostles: The Converting of three thousand Souls, is more than the Healing of three thousand Million of Lame, Blind, Deaf and Dumb; and yet this was the effect of Preaching the Word. The Word is the great Instrument used, in the *Turning men from the Power of Sin and Satan, unto God*, Acts 26.18. The Word Preached, is that *Immortal Seed*, whereby Sinners are begotten unto Christ; 'tis that which is the general means of *Faith*, Rom. 10. 14, 17. *Faith cometh by Hearing*. Hence the Ministers of the Gospel are called *Fathers*, because they usually beget many to God, by the Preaching of the Word.

Thus 'tis Profitable to Sinners.

2. *The Word Preached is Profitable to Saints*. The most holy men on Earth, are not past benefit by the Word; none are so perfect, as to be above the use of this Ordinance: The Word Preached is Soul-food for the strong, as well as for the weak Christian.

It is Profitable to Saints

1. *For Sanctification*, Preaching not only Begins,

Begins, but Carries on the Work of Grace in the heart: The Gospel-Ministry is appointed for Edification, as well as Conversion, Eph. 4. 11, 12. *He gave some Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ.* The Word is the Spiritual Food, by which the Regenerate are nourished and promoted in their *Spiritual Growth in Christ*, 1 Pet. 2. 2. Hence Ministers are called *Pastors*, because they are to Feed the Flock of Christ, that they may grow thereby: They are also call'd *Builders*, because they are not only to lay the Foundation in a work of Grace, but also to Superstruct and Rear up the Spiritual Building of Christ: They are likewise called *Vine-Dressers*, because they are to dress and tend the Trees Planted in Gods Vineyard; that so they may thrive and flourish in Fruitfulness. Once more, they are compared to *Clouds*, which drop Rain, in order to Fruit bearing.

2. *For quickning.* The Saints are many times dull and drowzy; the *Wise Virgins* have their slumbring and sleeping fits, as well as the *Foolish*; they move very heavily and slowly in the ways of God; their Spirit of Liveliness may, and sometimes does much abate; their Graces may not

be

be so vigorously exercised, nor duties so conscientiously attended, as they ought to be, and sometimes have been: Saints may greatly Decay as to the Power of Godliness in their hearts, and the Practise of it in their Lives: Now God by his Faithful Messengers oftentimes Excites their Graces, and stirs them up to the Practise of Neglected Duties. *David* Lived several months without any inward Exercise of Godly Sorrow, or outward Expressions of Repentance, for his Notorious Sins of *Murder* and *Adultery*; but God sent his Servant *Nathan* the Prophet to him, and he Awakened him to a speedy and sincere Repentance, *Psal.* 51. the Title: That Penitent Psalm was Penn'd when *Nathan* came unto him, which was after the Birth of the unlawfully begotten Child: So long did he lye in Sin Unrepented. Sluggish, Loytering Christians are quickened in their pace and motion, by a zealous, lively and powerful Ministry.

3. *For Consolation.* The dear Children of God are many times Disconsolate and Dejected; their Spirits are full of heaviness and sorrow, almost to overwhelming, from the malicious Suggestions of Satan, through their own falls into some Sin, through the workings of Unbelief in the heart, and through

through divine withdrawments, their inward state of Soul may be very sorrowfully circumstanced: When the case is thus with them, God oftentimes by the Preaching of the Word, lets fall some Crumbs of Comfort unto them; the opening and applying the Promises in the Ministry, yield great spiritual refreshing and consolation to their drooping Spirits; many a chearing Cordial is given to a fainting Soul, in and by the Word of Hearing; they have come to a Sermon with a sad and heavy heart, but have gone away with a glad and light heart; their doubts have been satisfied, their fears removed, and that joy created in their Souls, which they would not part with for a World. The Gospel Ministry, is one of the *Wells of Salvation*, out of which the Saints *Draw Waters with Joy*. Ministers are therefore said to be *Helpers* of the Saints Joy, 2 Cor. 1. 24.

4. *For Confirmation and Establishment in Grace and Godliness.* The Perseverance of Saints is most certain; they shall never wholly lose Grace, as to its Principles or Exercise; the Immutable Election of God, and the standing powerful Intercession of Jesus Christ, together with many other things, do infallibly secure them against any such Apostasy: A Child of God shall never

ver become graceleſs and ungodly; one of thoſe means which God makes uſe of for the confirming them in their Spiritual State and Life, is the Miniſtry of the Word. Supplies of ſtrengthning Grace are communicated by Miniſterial Exhortations; 'tis therefore ſaid of *Paul* and *Barnabas*, that by their Exhortations, they *Confirmed the Souls of the Diſciples*, Acts 14. 22.

PROPOSITION II. *Many however are not Profited by the Word Preached unto them.* Altho' the Miniſtry of the Word be an Ordinance exceedingly ſuited and adapted to Soul good, yet few there be that get good thereby: How few are awakened by the terrible Threatnings of God denounced and ſolemnly urged? How few are won by the ſweet and gracious Promiſes opened and applied? How few follow the wholſome Counſels and Directions that are given them? How few are Converted, or Reformed, or Live up to the Truths that they hear? The Goſpel in the Preaching of it, has from the Beginning been a very unſucceſsful Word: *Noah* was a *Preacher of Righteouſneſs*; *Chriſt* by him Preached the *Goſpel* to the Firſt World; but what little good did he among that looſe and corrupt Generation? The *Prophets* have often complained

plained of the unsuccessfulness of their Labours among the Professing People of God, Isa. 53. 1. *Who hath Believed our Report?* Our Lord *Jesus* was a Preacher, and the best of Preachers; *for no man ever spake as he did*, with that sweetness, clearness, gravity, majesty and authority; and yet how few profited by his Ministry? He himself complains, *That He had laboured in vain, and spent his strength for nought and in vain*; Isa. 49. 4. The *Apostles*, although they were great Instruments of Conversion, yet the generality of their Hearers, especially among the Jews, rejected and opposed their Ministry. And all the ordinary Ministers of the Gospel ever since, have seen but little fruit of their Labours. Altho' we set before men the sufficiency, excellency and glory of Christ, yet few do prize him, or are ravished with him. Altho' we present men with a prospect of Heavens Blessedness, and Hells Torments, yet few *Fly from the Wrath that is to come, or Seek the Kingdom of Heaven*. Our Lord has given us a Parable on purpose to shew us how few of our Hearers are Profited by the Word which we Preach, *Matth.* 13. begin. Among four sorts of Hearers, only one is good; the odds is three to one: the generality of men remain ignorant, unconvinced, secure, unconverted,

converted, under our Ministry. Some are profane Hearers, some negligent, some unbelieving, some unpractical; but very few that are good.

APPLICATION.

USE I. *Of Information. The bare Hearing the Word is not sufficient to Save.*

Hearing may be without Soul saving benefit. The *Hypocrite* and *Moralist* may toil in the External part of Religious Duties, and yet Lose their Souls, and Heaven at the last. Men may be much in Frequenting both the publick and private Preaching of the Word, and yet miss of Salvation after all: Altho' we may be able in the Day of Judgment, to say, *Lord, hast thou not Taught in our Streets?* Yet 'twill be no Saving Plea alone; Christ will notwithstanding that, bid us to *Depart from him*, Luke 13. 26, 27. Outward Attendance on the Word in a constancy, is but a Sandy Foundation to build the hopes of Salvation upon, *Matth.* 7. 26. to the end. Persons do but delude themselves, that think to get to heaven by hearing only, *Jam.* 1. 22. *Be Doers of the Word, not Hearers only, deceiving your selves.* O be more than Hearers now, or else you will be nothing less then Damned hereafter.

USE

USE II. *Of Exhortation. Labour to Profit by the Word of God Preached unto you:* Be not content with the bare Hearing, but endeavour to feel the power of it, and to gain the good of it; do what you can, that the Word of God, may be a good Word to you.

Heads of Motive.

1. The first Head of Motives may be taken *From the Preachers of the Word themselves.* In three or four particulars.

1. *If you do not Profit by the Word Preached, you will make them labour in vain as to you.* Indeed towards God we shall not labour in vain, Isa. 49. 4. *Then said I, verily I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for naught, and in vain, [yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.*] How much soever we labour in vain as to man, yet not as to God; He will reward us according to our faithfulness, and not according to our success. If Ministers be diligent and faithful in the discharge of their Duty, they shall be honourably Recompenced, although none of their Hearers profit by them: If we solemnly warn Sinners, and they will not take the warning, we shall however *Deliver our own Souls*, Ezek. 3. 19. 'Tis not in

our

our power to convert Sinners; our teaching is only instrument to the effectual teachings of the Spirit; God therefore will not cut us short in our reward, because Sinners remain Unconverted and perish. In the great Day, Christ will say unto us, *Well done*, if we have been *Good and Faithful Servants*, although unsuccessful, *Mat.* 25. 21. If Sinners do not profit by us, it will be their loss, not ours; we are a *sweet Savour to Christ in them that perish, as well as them that are Saved*, 2 *Cor.* 2. 15. God will accept our Labours, though men be not advantaged by them.

But although we do not Labour in vain as to God, yet we shall as to you, if you be not profited by us: Unprofiting Hearers make us take pains to no purpose. O Sirs! will you support us? Will you set us on work? Will you call us to spend our time and strength? and all at last in vain? shall we beseech, entreat, command, charge, exhort, and in the issue lose our Labour! The Service of your Souls is one great end of our Ministry, and to lose this end, to miss of attaining it, is a most uncomfortable Disappointment and Frustration.

2. *If you do not profit, you will damp their Spirits, and weaken their Hands in their work*: There is not a more heart-breaking thing,

to Holy and Faithful Ministers, then to see the unprofitableness of their Labour with a People: Our dear Lord was *Grieved for the hardness of his Hearers hearts*, Mar. 3. 5. He shed tears over *Jerusalem*, because of their Impenitence and Unbelief under his publick Ministry, *Luke* 19. 41, 42. Godly, Painful Ministers go up and down with an heavy heart, when they do little or no good to their Hearers: And when their Spirits are sunk, their hands grow weak in their work. 'Tis a great strengthning to a Preacher in his Ministry, when he perceives that he is useful, and a Blessing in his place; when those that are under his care do thrive and flourish: O how chearfully does he go on in his work! but when he sees that few or none are the better for him, he moves heavily, and waxes weary of his work. *Jeremy* was ready to throw up his Ministry, and resolve against Preaching any more, because the Word of the Lord was despised, Jer. 20. 9. *The Word of the Lord was made a reproach to me, and a derision daily: Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his Name.*

3. *If you do not Profit, you will provoke God to Silence them by Sickness, Persecution or Death.* God usually shuts the Preachery mouth, when Hearers shuts their Hearts.

Sometimes

Sometimes by Persecution God drives Ministers into Corners, because of a Peoples Unprofitableness: Sometimes God casts them upon Beds of Languishing, and sometimes he shuts them up in the Grave, because those that heard them, did not Profit by them: God calls them home, & will not suffer them to Labour in vain any longer. One of the most ready ways to provoke God to put out a Light, is to play about it, and not to work by it: Many an excellent Preacher Dies before his time, because of the unworthiness and unfruitfulness of a People. Are you minded to have God dismiss them from their work? Are you willing to be rid of them? would you have them speak no more to you in the Name of the Lord? If so, do not mind their Preaching, do not live according to their Directions: If Good be not gotten by a Faithful Ministry, God will soon put an end to it, or shew a miracle of Patience, or continue it in Judgment.

4. *If you do not Profit, you will put them upon very unpleasing work*: A work unpleasing both to them and you.

1. *You will put them upon complaining to God of you.* 'Tis very undesirable to Affectionate Ministers, to carry Complaints to God against their Hearers; they would

more

more gladly commend them to God, then complain of them; yet this they are many times constrained to do. *Jeremiah* cryes out to God of his being despised and abused by those to whom he was sent, *Chap.* 20. 8. The Prophet *Ezekiel* complains of his profane Hearers, who Scoffed at his Prophecies, and called them *Riddles* and *Dreams*, Ezek. 20. 49. *Ah Lord God! they say of me, doth he not speak Parables?* Dark Unintelligible Notions.

2. *You will put them upon bearing witness against you in the Day of Judgment.* Ministers and their Hearers must all appear before the Judgment-Seat of Christ, and then Ministers must give an Account to Christ, not only of themselves, but also of those that have been under their Care, Heb. 13. 17. *Obey them that have the Rule* [*Ministerial Rule*] *over you, and submit your selves; for they watch for your Souls, as they that must give account: that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you.* They will be called to give their Testimony for, or against you. Ministers Sent by Christ, are not only Officers, but *Witnesses*, Acts 26. 16. They do now bear Witness of Christ and his Doctrine, and will hereafter be Witnesses for Christ, against such as Disobey him.

Ministers

Ministers are Christ's *Embassadours*, that are sent to offer and propound Tearms of Peace to Sinners, and they must at the Great Day of Hearing, give an Account of their Embassy. Alas! How unwilling are they to be your Accusers? And yet they will be constrained in the Judgment, to say, *Lord, We did according to the best of our Ability, declare thy whole Counsel and Mind unto them: We did earnestly Beseech them, faithfully Warn them, sharply Reprove them, seriously Exhort them; but they Regarded us not.* Those very mouths that are opened unto you in the way of an Ordinance, will then be opened against you in way of Accusation.

5. *If you do Profit, you will be a rejoycing to them now, and a Crown of Rejoycing to them at that Day.*

You will Rejoyce them now. Ministers that unfeignedly Love the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Souls of men, do rejoyce in nothing more, than the good success of the Gospel. The Apostle *John* had *no greater joy, than to see his Children walking in the Truth*, 3 Epistle *v.* 3, 4. *Barnabas*, an holy man of God, was glad when he saw the Grace of God in the Faith and Conversion

of the People at *Antioch*, Acts 11 23. when Sinners are Converted, and Converts Edified under a man's Ministry, it is the greatest joy and comfort that he has in the whole World. When *Timothy* brought to *Paul* the tidings of the Faith and Charity of the *Thessalonians*, (who were Converted by him) his Soul was greatly comforted, revived and rejoiced, 1 *Thes.* 3. 6, 7, 8, 9. The Charity of *Philemon*, whom *Paul* Converted, was a great Joy and Consolation to him, *Philem. v.* 7. 'Tis matter of abundant satisfaction to Christ's Servants in the Work of the Gospel, to see the Travel of their Souls; to see that they have not Laboured in vain.

You will also be a Crown of Rejoycing to them at that Day, 1 Thes. 2 19, 20. *What is our Joy, or Crown of Rejoycing? are not even ye in the Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his Coming?* so 2 Cor. 1. 14. What an Honour and a Joy will it be to Ministers, when they shall be able to say, *Lord, here are we, and the Children which thou hast given us?* Your Piety will be their Honour, your Holiness their Crown at the Great Day: This very thing the *Apostle* uses as an argument to quicken his *Philippians*, to an holy and blameless

blameleſs life, Phil. 2. 15, 16. *Be blameleſs, be harmleſs, that I may Rejoyce in the Day of Chriſt, that I have not run in vain, nor laboured in vain.*

This is the firſt Head of Motives.

2. A Second Head of Motives is, *The Awfulneſs of our Standing under the Miniſtry.* *Bethel* is a dreadful place, *Gen.* 28. 17. Such as Live under the Goſpel Miniſtry, have their Standing in the Houſe and Vineyard of God, which is a matter of moſt awful Conſideration. For,

1. *The Ax lyes at the Root of every tree:* So *John* the *Baptiſt* told thoſe that came to his Miniſtry, *Math.* 3. 10. Wherever there are the means of Salvation, wherever the Word of God is Preached, at that very time, there is an *Ax*, an Inſtrument of Vengeance laid to the Root of every Tree. God ſtands ready to cut down every one that is Unfruitful under the Means of Grace: A Tree that is barren in God's incloſed and Well tended *Vineyard*, is in far greater danger, than one that is barren in the open, neglected Wilderneſs of the World. If we do not thrive and profit under profiting means, we ſtand in conti-

tinual jeopardy, and may expect the fatal blow to be given every moment; did men more frequently and seriously think of this, they would undoubtedly give more diligent heed unto the things which they hear; they would be more careful about profiting, then commonly they are. Remember, That while the Word of God is Preaching, God is walking in the midst of us, with his Ax in his Hand, threatning to hew down every careless fruitless Hearer.

2. *We are upon our Tryal for Eternity.* The time of the Gospel-Dispensation, is our Probation-time for Eternity. Certainly we shall Live in Eternity, and certainly our Eternity will be blessed or miserable; and as certain also it is, that the Everlasting Well or Ill fare of our Souls depends upon our present Well or Ill improving the Gospel-Administration. If we Profit by the Word of God now, we shall be Blessed for ever; but if we Live and Dye Unfruitful, we shall be accursed for ever, while God is using means with us, he puts us upon our *great* and *last* Tryal for Eternity: Now is our Day of Grace and Salvation, and if this present Season be let slip without Soul profit, God will try us no more, we shall have no further opportunity

portunity wherein to Secure a blessed Eternity; there will be no coming back from the Grave to mend what has been amiss. Nor will God send a Messenger after us to the Grave to continue the Treaty of Peace: No, no, The Grave is a place of Silence, and they that go down to it, hear not the Voice of the Charmer: *Men must stand or fall to Eternity, as they accept or refuse the Message of Christ.* Would Persons duely and seriously think hereon, their care of profiting would unquestionably be much greater than 'tis.

3. A Third Head of Motives, may be taken from *The Evil Consequents of not Profiting by the Word of God.* Many awful and dismal things do follow hereupon.

1. *Temporal Judgments.* In time, in this present World, God usually punishes Unprofitableness. He many times visits them, both with *Outward* and *Spiritual* Judgments.

1. *Outward Judgments.* Unfruitfulness is sometimes punished with sore External Calamities; because a People do not comply with the Gospel Treaty of Peace: God visits them with *Wars*, because they do not Flourish in Fruitfulness, under Gospel influ-

ences. God blasts and blows upon the *Fruits of the Earth*, because they do not Feed upon their Spiritual Food: God brings upon them, *A Famine of Bread and Water*, because their Souls are not healthful and prospering under Soul-prospering means; God visits them with *Bodily Sicknesses*. The People of *Israel* in the Dayes of *Zedekiah*, *mocked the Messengers of God, despised the Word of God spoken by them*; and what was the event of it? Why, God slew multitudes of them by the Sword, and the rest he carried Captives into *Babylon*; the Temple was plundered and burnt, the Walls of *Jerusalem* were Demolished, and a dismal Destruction was brought upon them; 2 *Chron.* 36. 16, 17, &c. In the Dayes of our Lord *Jesus*, and his *Apostles*, the People of the *Jews* profited not by their Ministry; and for this they were made Desolate: The *Romans* Destroyed their City and Temple a second time, and laid their whole Countrey waste; and they are to this Day a banished, scattered People in the Earth.

2. *Spiritual Judgments.* These are most Awful, and yet very usual Dispensations of God; they are indeed of a Spiritual nature, and so more secret and less discernable,

cernable, but never the leſs common. 'Tis an ordinary thing with God in theſe Goſpel times, to Lay Unprofiting Hearers under Spiritual Plagues.

1. *God ſometimes puts a Period to the Efficacy of the Word Preached.* Tho' the Goſpel may be continued as to the Outward Diſpenſation of it, yet 'tis without any Inward and Saving Efficacy upon their hearts: Unprofitable Hearers may have the Miniſtry of the Word continued to them, but no Bleſſing goes along with it, to the good of their Souls; the Ordinance abides, but its Efficacy and Power upon the heart ceaſes: thus it was as to the *Jews* of old, *Iſa.* 6. 9, 10. and this is the caſe of many barren Hearers under the Goſpel. God ſuffers the Word to be Preached to them, but he does not work with it; the Word Preached is judicially made a Lifeleſs word unto them; 'tis to be feared, that many have Lived ſo long unprofitably under the Goſpel, as that God has ſaid in Judgment, *Let the Word Preached never profit them more*, as God ſaid of the barren Fig tree, *Let no Fruit grow on thee hence forward for ever*, Math. 21. 19. and how many are there that once felt ſomething of the power of the Word, who are now altogether unaf-

fected, unawakened, unhumbled, unreformed by it? It may be, the Seats under them are as much benefited and moved as they.

2. *God gives them over to wax worse and worse.* 'Tis a certain truth (as one says) *That Barrenness under the Gospel is always accompanied with an increase of Sin.* If men do not grow better, they will grow worse under the Means of Grace. If the Word be not a *Savour of Life, unto Life*, it will be, a *Savour of Death, unto Death*, 2 Cor. 2. 16. Men are either softned or hardned, made better or worse by the Word: Believe it, the ground upon which the Rain of Gospel-Doctrines often falls, if it bring not forth good fruits, it will bring forth Briars and Thorns, and Trash of all sorts. God in just judgment leaves barren Christians to abound and ripen in Sin; he says of them, *Let them be unjust, let them be filthy still*; let them go on in their Sins, and Filthiness without Restraint. O fear and tremble, least this should be your case; if it once come to this, it will be as easy for the very Devils, as for you, to escape the Damnation of Hell. And remember, that there is scarce a more ready way to provoke God to take off all Restraints from your

your Luſts, then to be regardleſs and careleſs about Profiting by the Word of God Preached unto you, Pſa. 81. 11, 12. *My People would not hearken to my voice, ſo I gave them up to their own hearts luſts.*

3. *God ſometimes brings upon them a Famine of the Word Preached.* When the Miniſtry of the Word is not attended to, with ſuitable Profiting, God deprives a People of it, Amos 8. 11. *Behold, the Dayes come, ſaith the Lord God, that I will ſend a Famine in the Land, not a Famine of Bread, nor a Thirſt for Water, but of Hearing the Words of the Lord.* The cauſe of this Judgment was, their growing weary of Sabbaths, and Sabbath Ordinances, through an inordinate love to the World, *verſe* 5. This Judgment is more terrible than a Famine of Bread; for as much as the Soul is better than the Body, ſo much worſe is a Spiritual, than a Bodily Famine; ten thouſand times better it is, that our Bodies ſhould ſtarve, than our Souls: And yet ſometimes God takes away Soul-food from a People, becauſe of their *Leanneſs of Soul* under the Enjoyment of it. God threatned the Church of *Epheſus*, to *Remove the Candleſtick out of its place*, Rev. 2. 5. and ſo he did. In this way God puniſhed the

Unfruitfulneſs of the Jews, according to the threatning ſolemnly denounced by our Lord, Mat. 21. 43. *God Let out his Vineyard unto other Husbandmen.* He Unchurched the Nation of the Jews, and ſent the Goſpel unto the Gentile World; and out of them gathered Evangelical Churches: The Kingdom was taken from the Jews, becauſe of their Unfruitfulneſs, and *Given to a Nation that ſhould bring forth the Fruits thereof*, Math. 21. 43. If therefore we would not have the Goſpel take its leave of us, if we would not be without the joyful ſound, if we would not have God remove his Tabernacle from amongſt us, Let us Labour to Profit by the Word.

Thus for the Firſt Evil that follows upon not Profiting.

2. A Second Evil Conſequent is, *A Bitter Lamentation at the laſt.* The time will come, when we ſhall with tears bewail our preſent Unprofiting. We may little regard or lay it to heart now, but in the *End* it will be *Bitterneſs* unto us. When we are going out of this World, or at the fartheſt, when we are gotten into the other World, we ſhall with heart piercing Cryes,

Cryes, Lament our not minding the Word of God more: Then shall we remember all the Instructions, Warnings, Reproofs, Counsels that have been seriously given to us, and shall with bleeding Souls bewail our disregard of them, Prov. 5. 11, 12, 13. And then mourn at the last, and say, *How have I hated Instruction, and my heart despised Reproof? and have not Obeyed the voice of my Teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that Instructed me?* Then shall we say, *Oh! If we had hearkened to such and such of God's Faithful Servants, it had never been with us as it is; they told of this before hand, and beseught and entreated us, but we would not hear: Had we lent an ear to them, and been obedient, we had never come to this pass.* Thus shall we, when it is to late, repent of our present Folly.

3 A third evil Consequent is, *A sad Reckoning in the Day of the Lord.* Certainly there will a day come, wherein God will call us to an account: The Judgment day will be a Reckoning day; then will Christ Reckon with us about the *Talents* we are entrusted withal. Among the many *Talents* which are now committed to us, our Gospel enjoyments are none of the least. Verily, every Sermon which we have heard

we

we muſt be accountable to God for: the hearing the Word is not only a Duty and Priviledge, but a *Talent*; Chriſt will inquire, what Good we have gotten by the many Sermons which we have heard; and Oh! what a poor, miſerable account will they be able to give, who have nothing profited thereby! Did men believe that they muſt eſpecially be accountable to God for their having opportunities, they would be more concerned about an uſeful improvement of them.

4. *A moſt dreadful Damnation.* If the Word of God do not become the Inſtrument of mens Salvation, it will be an occaſion of their greateſt Damnation. The enjoyment of the Goſpel will be an aggravation of mens Sin and Puniſhment, where it is not attended unto with profit. No Sinners ſhall be ſo miſerably deſtroyed as thoſe that remain fruitleſs under the Goſpel diſpenſation: their Sins are incomparably greater than the ſins of others; other mens ſins are comparatively no ſins to theirs. *John* 15. 22. *If I had not come, and ſpoken unto them, they had not had ſin.* The Publick Miniſtry of Chriſt among them made their ſins great by many degrees, than otherwiſe they would

would have been. And as their sins are incomparably greater than others, so will their punishments be: *God will proportion mens Punishment to their Sins*; the greatest Sinners shall be the greatest sufferers. The degrees of wrath will be according to the degrees of Sin. None therefore shall lye under so heavy a burden of Divine Vengeance, as those that go down to the Grave in their Sins, from under the clear and faithful dispensation of the Gospel. The People of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, although they were Monsters and Prodigies of wickedness, shall however fare better in the day of the Lord's wrath, than those that do not with Faith and Obedience entertain the Gospel of Christ Preached by his Embassadours, *Math.* 10. 14, 15. *Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words; when you depart out of that House, or City, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily, I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of Judgment, than for that City.* How little is this believed or considered by the generality of Hearers?

4. A fourth head of Motives may be taken from *the Benefits of Profiting by the Word.* I shall mention but two of the

the most comprehensive and principal of them.

1. *An Increase of Spiritual Blessings in this Life.* Spiritual Blessings are the best and most excellent blessings, incomparably better than all outward blessings; Spiritual blessings are Soul blessings, others are only Bodily: Spiritual blessings are alwayes the fruits of Gods special Love, others may proceed only from his common Love: Spiritual blessings make us amiable in the sight of God, others do not: Spiritual blessings have a sure and inseparable Connexion with Glory, others have not. Now profiting by the Word of God will cause us to abound in these blessings. God will increase the graces and fruits of a profiting hearer.

God will increase the Graces of such an one. A larger stock of knowledge, love, humility, meekness, patience, faith &c. shall be given to him, *Mark* 4. 24. *Unto you that hear shall more be given.* 'Tis the wonted course of God to reward Grace with Grace: Such as exercise their Graces under an Ordinance, shall experience a growth in Grace.

God will also multiply the fruits of a profiting hearer. Every tree that beareth fruit,

fruit, the Heavenly *Husbandman will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit*, Joh. 15. 2. Fruitfulneſs ſhall be bleſſed with Fruitfulneſs. *The earth which drinks in the rain that cometh often upon it, and bringeth forth Herbs meet for them by whom it is dreſſed, receiveth bleſſing from God*, Heb. 6. 7. A bleſſing of increaſe ſhall be upon it.

O what a powerful Motive is this to look well to our profiting! To a true Child of God, to one that knows the real worth of Spiritual bleſſings; there can ſcarce a more forcible conſideration be propounded. *A Saint indeed* does moſt ardently deſire a growth in every Grace and Good Work: *the Weakneſs of his Graces* and the *Barrenneſs of his Converſation* are things which do moſtly trouble him: 'Tis the longing deſire of his Soul that he may be more holy in heart & life; that he may be more ſtrengthned in the inward man, and more filled with the fruits of Righteouſneſs.

2. *A Reward of Infinite, Eternal bleſſings in the Life to come.* Such as hear the Voice of Chriſt, to them he will *give Eternal life*, Joh. 10. 27, 28. Every tree that is fruitful in Gods Vineyard, ſhall, when it

it is removed from hence, be transplanted into the Garden of God above. The Promise is, *Hear, and your Souls shall live.* Christ has assured retentive, practical hearers of blessedness, *Luk.* 11. 28. Those that profit by the Word shall find it a Word of eternal Salvation unto their Souls. Of a certainty, those that thrive under the Ministry of Christ by men, shall at Death be placed under the immediate, personal Ministry of Christ in Heaven. And that which the *Queen of Sheba* said concerning them that stood before *Solomon*; may much more be said of them that stand before our glorious *Solomon* above, *Happy are thy men, and happy are these thy Servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy Wisdom.* Well then, if either the blessings of the Kingdom of Grace or of Glory be of any Consideration with you, be careful that the Word Preached be profiting to you.

Directions for Hearing the Word to Profit.

DIRECT-

DIRECTION. I.

Do not Harbour in your Hearts any Prejudices against the Preachers of the Word. The Devil is very busy to fill mens minds with Prejudices against Gospel Ministers. There is no Profession in the World so directly subversive of the Devils kingdom, as that of the Ministry: the proper work and business of Ministers is to *destroy* the interest of Satan, and to *promote* the interest of Christ; they are sent to *turn men from Satan unto God, Acts* 26. 18. The Devil therefore has a peculiar spight against their Persons and Ministry: and if it be possible he will create in the hearts of men ill will to, and prejudices against them; he knows that there is scarce a more ready way to make the Word unsuccessfull, than for men to be prejudiced against the Preachers of it. If men are ill-willers or disaffected to a Minister, there is little likelihood of their getting good by his labours: See then that you watch against this.

Sometimes Persons are prejudiced against them because of their *meanness as to parentage*

rentage or *outward Circumstances*. It pleases God oftentimes to call those to the Ministry, that are of a low descent, and that make but a very little figure in the eyes of the World, 1 *Cor.* 1. 26, 27, 28. And although God consults his own greater Glory by putting the Gospel *treasure* into *Earthen Vessels*, yet on the account hereof, Persons, especially those that are of an Higher rank in the World, do not and cannot stand so well affected unto them. It was the outward meanest of Christs Person and Parentage which in a great measure prejudiced the Jews against him, and made them slight his Doctrine.

Sometimes men are prejudiced against them because of their *Infirmities*. God will not speak to us immediately himself, nor will he speak to us by *Angels*, but by men that have degrees of darkness and corruption in them. *Elijah* a great Prophet of the Lord, was a *man subject to like Passions with our selves*, *Jam.* 5. 17. Ministers are liable to miss it in their Administrations and Conversations. Dont let your hears hereupon be prejudiced against them; let no contempt of them or ill-will unto them be hereupon entertained. We do not plead for an allowance in any thing that is wicked

wicked, God forbid: We only ask a charitable covering of such Infirmities as are common to the best: and that there may be no heart burnings against us, because of weaknesses. If you be not careful in this matter, we cannot expect to be instrumental of Saving Good unto you. Let us Preach never so well, yet we shall be of little use, as long as mens hearts are against us and not towards us. 'Tis true, we should *like the Word* though we do not *love the Man*; we should entertain the Truth by whomsoever it is brought unto us: but experience showes, that Serious Reproofs, Prudent Counsels, and friendly Admonitions are little regarded, when Administred to us by such as we do not honour, esteem or love. *If the Person that speaks to us be not much regarded by us, we shall little mind what he sayes unto us.*

DIRECTION II.

Make Profiting the end of your coming to Hear the Word; desire to hear, that you may grow thereby, 1 Pet. 2. 2. Make this your aim and design: One reason why men profit not by the Word, is, because they do not propound this unto themselves, as their end;

Spi-

Spiritual Profit is not what they intend, but ſomething elſe.

Some come to Hear that they may *Carp* and *Eſpy Faults*; 'tis not their own good, but the Preachers hurt which they aim at; Malice makes them preſent at a Sermon: For this end many were ſent, and came to hear Chriſt, even, *That they might find ſomewhat whereof to accuſe him*, Mark 12. 13.

Others come to hear, That they may *Sport themſelves*, and make merry with what is delivered; this is the end which profane Scoffers propound. Let us hear, ſay they, *What this Babler will ſay*, Acts 17. 18.

Others come meerly to *Pleaſe their Fancies*; expecting that ſome curious Diſcourſe will be made, ſome quaint Notions ſtarted, or ſome Elegant Stile uſed: Curioſity and Pleaſure of mind bring them to a Sermon. *Ezekiels Hearers* called upon one another to come and hear him, only becauſe he was a ſweet and skilful Preacher: he had a *Pleaſant Voice, and could Play well upon an Inſtrument*, Ezek 30. 32.

Others

Others come to Hear in complyance with the *Custom of the Times and Places*, wherein they Live: 'Tis the fashion and mode of the Age, and they won't be singular, to go to a Sermon is in common usage, and they do as others do, Ezek. 33. 31. *They came as my People use to do.*

Others come to *Save their Credit.* Non-Attendance upon the Ministry of the Word, would hurt them in their Reputation; they would suffer in their Name, Disgrace would befal them, they would become the common talk of the World, if they should neglect the Publick Preaching of the Word.

Others come only to *Furnish their minds with Knowledge*: 'Tis the Enriching their Heads with Gifts, and not their Hearts with Graces which they aim at.

Others come *To see and be seen*, to show their Fine Apparrel, to observe the Fashions, or lasciviously to gaze *upon* Lust-pleasing Objects; 'tis the satisfaction of their Lusts, and not the Salvation of their Souls they aim at.

Finally,

Finally, Others come meerly to *Quiet Conscience.* Conscience won't let them alone in the neglect of a known Ordinance; therefore to appease Conscience, and calm the rage of it, they do sometimes attend upon the Word.

While men come only with such ends as these, what reason can there be to expect a Blessing upon the Word? Indeed, God in Soveraign Grace may sometimes extraordinarily set home the Word Preached upon their Souls, to their Awakening and Saving Conversion: but in an ordinary way, this is not to be looked for: We must come to the Word with earnest desires and designs of Profiting by it, and then we may expect to find benefit, if we come to *Get Good*, 'tis very probable, God will *Do us Good* by the Word: Good Designs God is ready to close in with, and succeed.

DIRECTION III.

Give Diligent Attention to the Word Preached. 'Tis said, *That the People were very Attentive to hear Christ*, Luke 19. 48. Unprofitableness comes of Unattentiveness.

How

How can good be gotten, when what is ſaid is not minded? Attention implyes an *Outward Liſtening* of the Ear, and an *Inward Application* of the mind, unto what is ſpoken.

There muſt be a *Liſtening* of the Ear unto what is ſpoken in Order to *Benefiting* by it. If truths be not received in at the ear, how can they reach the heart by any Saving influence? Unto this outward Attention a *Drowzineſs* and Sleep of body is directly oppoſite, and therefore to be ſtriven againſt. In ſleep the Senſes are lockt up; the door of hearing, is ſhut againſt the Word, that it can have no entrance to the Soul. Shake off therefore a Slumbring and Sleepy frame, and ſtir up your ſelves unto wakefulneſs. Do not be ſuch drowzy Diſciples, as not to be able to watch with Chriſt one hour. Beſides the unbecoming *Irreverence* and viſible contempt of God in Sleeping at a Sermon; there is alſo very great Soul loſs ſuſtained: 'Tis ſhameful, Sinful and Dammifying: To a Sleeper, a Sermon is of a certainty loſt in whole or in part, as to any good gotten by it; they might as well have been abſent as preſent. If therefore we would not loſe the bleſſing of this Ordinance it concerns

cerns us carefully to avoid whatsoever may dispose to Sleep. Do not run into the house of God from the *toils of the World*, or from a *full Table*: A wearied body and a Stomach charged with meats or drink dispose to Sleep; moderation is an help to Wakefulness; *Be Sober, be Vigilant*, 1 Pet. 5. 8.

Besides this Outward Listening of the Ear, there must also be an *Inward Application* of the mind to what is spoken. Not only must the *Sound* sink into the Ear, but the *Sense* into the Soul, in order to Profiting, Prov. 2. 2, 5. *My Son, Encline thine Ear unto Wisdom, and apply thine Heart to understanding; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord.* The Soul must be *Bound to the Horns of the Altar*, the mind be intent upon what is delivered, or else the Word Preached will signifie no more than water spilt upon the Rock. Unto this Inward Attention, *Distraction* of mind, is directly opposite, and therefore to be strived against; call in your hearts, and keep them closely applyed unto the Word Preached. How can you Profit, if you are thinking of one thing, and the Minister speaking of another thing? if mens *Hearts go after their Covetousness*; if their minds are running upon

upon their *Farms* and *Merchandiſe*; how can Divine Truths Delivered *ſink* deep into their Souls? It is therefore neceſſary in order unto an Hearing to Profit; that a ſtrict Watch be kept over the heart; nothing is ſo vain and ſhifting as the mind of man; the very Quick-ſilver does not ſcatter and ramble more than the thoughts of the mind; inſomuch that 'tis one of the hardeſt things in the World to keep our minds fixed to Spiritual Duties: *Do not therefore of choice run into the Houſe of God, from an hurry of Worldly Buſineſſes.* Give your minds ſome Diverſion from Secular Affairs, that ſo you may leave the World behind you, when you come to the Worſhip of *God*.

Theſe things are ſpoken, as having their reference to the Word of *God* Diſpenſed *Out of Seaſon*, as well as *In Seaſon*, on our own Days as well as the Lord's.

As a farther ſtanding help to this Duty of diligent Attention to the Word of *God* at all times, it will be good for us to *Realize the Authority of God in a Sermon, and His Preſence with it.*

Gods Authority in a Sermon. If it be

asked by what Authority Ministers lawfully Called, do Preach? It is answered, by the Authority of Christ, God in the Flesh. 'Tis he sends them; they Receive a Commission from him; 'tis *in his Name* that they speak unto men. In their Work they *Represent Christ*, 2 Cor. 5. 20. *Now then, we are Embassadours for Christ, as though God* [*Incarnate*] *did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye Reconciled to God.* When therefore Christ sent forth his Disciples to Preach, he says unto them, *He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me*, Luke 10. 16. Remember then, when Christ's Ministers speak to you in the Discharge of their Office, 'tis as *if Christ Himself spake unto you*; they represent him in his *Prophetical Office*; the Words which they speak according to the mind and will of Christ, are not the words of man, but indeed the words of God. This duely and believingly thought on, would command & quicken our Attention.

Again, *Realize Gods Presence with a Sermon.* God in an especial manner is present at a Sermon, Acts 10. 33. *We are all here present before God, to hear all things that are Commanded thee of God.* In all parts of Wor-

Worſhip, God looks upon us with a Jealous Eye. Let this be Realized, and it will help our Attention: Say to your ſelves, *Of a truth, God is in this place, the Lord is in the midſt of the Congregation of his People.* Did we often in a Sermon put our hearts in mind of this, we ſhould not be ſo Sleepy of Body, and roving in Mind, as we ordinarily are: *Forgetfulneſs of God, is a main cauſe of careleſsneſs in Worſhip.*

DIRECTION IV.

Make a particular Application of the Word unto your ſelves. Self-Application is neceſſary unto Profiting by the Word. The moſt excellent Plaiſter can do no good, unleſs applyed to the Sore. Men muſt look upon themſelves as concerned in what is delivered, and bring it home to their own Souls, or elſe it will be of no uſe unto them: There is no Truth inſiſted upon, but it is of *preſent*, or may be of *after* Concernment unto us; ſome way or other it is belonging to us, and we ſhould take it to our ſelves, as that which we do or may need. The miſery of many Hearers is, that they hear for *others*, not for *themſelves*; they are continually applying what is ſpoken, unto others, and put it a-

way from themselves as not concerned therein? When any Sin is reproved or confuted, and when any Duty is required or urged, they say, such and such persons will do well to mind what is said; not looking upon it as in any sort appertaining to them. Alas! if we do not take the Spiritual Food into our own mouths, if we don't lay our own lips unto the breasts of the Gospel, we can draw no nourishment from it. What Ministers Preach to all, every one should impartially apply to his own Soul, Job 5. 27. *Hear, thou, and know it for thy good.* Say of every *Doctrine*, this is my Lesson, I must Learn it: Of every *Command*, this is my Duty, I must Practise it: Of every *Admonition*, this is a Warning to me, I must take it: Of every *Caution*, this is a Watch-word to me, I must give heed unto it: Of every *Direction*, this is my Rule, I must follow it: And of every *Promise*, this is my Encouragement, I must live upon it. Such sole Applications of things will much further their Saving Impression and Influence upon our Souls.

DIRECTION V.

Mix the Word with Faith. In our *Context*, it is given as a reaſon why the Word Preached did not Profit the *Iſraelites* namely, *Becauſe it was not mixed with Faith in them that heard it.* Their Unbelief rendred the Word of God ineffectual and unprofiting. Without Faith the Word of God will not become Soul ſaving; Believers only are Saved in Hearing the Word: *The Goſpel of Chriſt is the power of God unto Salvation, to every one that believeth,* Rom. 1. 16. *By the fooliſhneſs of Preaching it pleaſes God to ſave them that Believe,* 1 Cor. 1. 21. In Believers, and in them only it is, that the Word of God becomes a Living, Operative Principle of Holy Obedience and Fruitfulneſs, 1 Theſ. 2. 13. *Ye Received the Word of God which ye heard of us; which worketh alſo effectually in you that Believe.* The Word thus becomes a Soul-purifying, Fruit bearing, and Soul ſaving Principle, from its mixture with Faith. Faith brings into the Soul the *Ideas* or Images of good things held forth in the *Promiſes*; and incorporates it ſelf therewith, and thereby carries out the Soul in earneſt deſires, and diligent endeavours after them:

The Glory of Christ and his Kingdom, which have a real *Subsistence without us*, are by Faith made to have a mental *Subsistence within us*; which is not a meer *Conception* or *Apprehension* of them, but such a lively *Impression* and *Representation* of them, as darkens the glory of this World, takes off the Affections from Earthly Things, and works up the Heart to a satisfying delight in, longing desires after, and a rejoycing expectation of, beholding this Glory of Christ and his Kingdom: This is at large described in the *Eleventh Chapter to the Hebrews*. By Faith's thus mixing it self with the Promise, as holding forth such great and glorious things, the Word of Promise becomes a *Word of Salvation*.

Faith also mixing it self with the Word of *Threatning*, apprehends the Terrours of the Lord, and realizes them to the Soul, whereby a person is awakened to Repentance, hastened to Christ, the great Reconciler; & excited to a careful watchfulness against, and abstinence from Sin.

Faith likewise mixing it self with the Word of *Precept*, apprehends the reasonableness, equity, purity and goodness thereof, whereby a Believer is quickned unto an holy

holy care of universal conformity unto the Commandments of God.

Thus Faith as the *Active Principle*, and the Word Preached as the *Moral Instrument* of Salvation, mixing themselves together in Hearing, the Word becomes Soul saving.

Indeed, we must come to the Word Preached, *as the way appointed for the Spirits Working*; that so Faith may be wrought in us, in the exercise of which alone it is, that the Word will issue in our Eternal Salvation. 'Tis not Faith in the *Habit*, but Faith in *Actual Exercise*, that makes the Word Saving.

DIRECTION. VI.

Receive the Truth in the Love of it. This is necessary to Soul-saving benefit by it, 2 *Thes.* 2.10. *They received not the Love of the truth, that they might be saved.* Want of affection to Divine Truth hinders, their impression upon the heart. Some there be that *hate the light*, Joh. 3. 20. They cannot endure to have the light of some truths reflected upon them. The *Proud* person hates the lessons of *Humility*; the *Earthly-minded* man hates the doctrines of *Mortification*

to the World, and *Heavenly mindedness*; the *Hypocrite* hates the doctrines of *Sincerity*; and the *Revengful* person the doctrines of *Patient bearing of injuries, and requiting evil with good*. Such an inward antipathy and detestation of truths, makes men reject them with indignation or derision. The *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, and People of the *Jews* hated the close, home and plain doctrines of *Christ* and his *Apostles*, insomuch that the Word Preached did not profit them, but on the other hand, enraged their lusts and corruptions. If men cannot bear to have their sins pointed at and reproved; if they hate to be roundly told their duty and danger, the Word cannot advantage them: Every Truth without exception ought to be entertained with *Love*. We should not love to be sooth'd up, flattered or let alone in our sins, but take it well when our evil wayes are publickly bor'n witness against. Let sharp and close doctrines be esteemed, as well as, yea, rather more, than soft and smooth words.

DIRECTION. VII.

Be much in Prayer. *Praying* is a principal help to *Profiting*: *the Word is Sanctified by Prayer.* Men are generally *Fruitless* because *Prayerless.* O then Pray!

In general,

Pray to God to Teach you to Profit. 'Tis God alone can give us this Spiritual Skill of getting good by the Word. 'Tis not in the power of the Preacher or hearer to make the Word effectual; the power of *making wise to Salvation* is Gods Prerogative only: *Isa.* 48. 17. *I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit.* 'Tis the Lord only that can make us to profit by *Providences* or *Ordinances.* God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ do instruct by the Holy Spirit, whose special Office it is to give a principle of spiritual discerning, so as to know and understand Divine things unto Salvation, *Neh.* 9. 20. *Thou gavest also thy good Spirit, to instruct them.* Look up therefore to God in Prayer that he would send the Holy Ghost, to Sanctify and Save you by his truths.

More Particularly.

I. Pray before Hearing.

Pray, that God would *Aſſiſt* and *Direct* the Preacher, unto the Providing ſome ſuitable word for your Souls. The hearts of Miniſters are in the hands of the Lord, and many times he does ſecretly and powerfully direct their thoughts from one Subject and fix them upon another, in anſwer unto the Prayers of ſome particular Perſons. Prayer, although it cannot change the purpoſe of God, yet it may prevail with God to change the purpoſe of a Preacher, and ſend him with a Portion to us which he intended not.

Pray alſo, that God would *Put your hearts into, and keep them in a good frame:* The *Preparation* and *Fixation of the heart are both from the Lord.* 'Tis he muſt raiſe and keep up the flame of Devotion in our Souls, or elſe it will ſoon dye and go out; nothing is ſo *deceitful* as our *hearts*: When we have been labouring with God and them, to bring them into ſome ſuitable frame

frame for Religious VVorship, and are ready to think, that we are sure of their lively engagement therein; yet we often find, that the bow is presently unbent, and the good frame strangely lost before we come into the House of God; we had need therefore to beg of God, not only to *Set* our hearts right, but also to *Keep* them so.

Pray also, that God would *Meet* you and *Bless* you in the Ordinance of Preaching. Turn God's Promises into Prayer, and plead them with God. Say to him, Lord thou hast said, *Where two or three are met together in thy Name, thou wilt be in the midst of them.* Thou hast said, *That wheresoever thou hast Recorded thy Name thou wilt come unto me, and bless me.* O Lord! *Be it unto thy Servant according to thy Word.*

II. Pray in Hearing.

In the time of Hearing you should have your short *Ejaculatory* Prayers; these are no hinderances, but exceeding helps unto a Profitable Hearing the VVORD. VVhen any *Duty* is Pressed, say, Lord, help

help me to Practise this Duty! When any *Sin* is cautioned against, say, Lord help me to abstain from this Sin! When any *Promise* is opened and applyed, say, Lord help me to receive it, and live upon it!

'Tis exceeding useful thus to mix Prayer with Hearing the Word.

III. Pray after Hearing.

Follow every Sermon with your Prayers to God for a Blessing on it. Pray, That God would cause his Word to dwell richly in you; that he would *help* you to *Lay it up in your hearts, and to bring forth the fruits of it in your Lives.* Pray God to *forgive* all your deadness, dulness and distraction in Hearing. Do thus seriously, and not in formality, and you will find a Blessing by the Word.

Were this method of Prayer duely prosecuted and attended, it would bring in a great stock of Spiritual Riches by Hearing the Word. See then that you do not neglect this great Duty of Prayer, which has such a general influence into all acceptable and useful Religion. If you do not

Pray,

Pray, Ministers had almost as good never *Preach*. If God do not hear from you, there is little ground to think that you should be benefited by Hearing from them.

DIRECTION VIII.

Labour to retain as much as you can of what you hear. It can hardly be supposed, that any can carry away the whole of a Sermon; but yet there is none who may not carry away some of it. The scope and drift of it we may remember, or something peculiarly proper for us to retain. Divine Things are the best things, and of greatest importance; therefore we should be careful to charge our Memories principally with them.

Indeed our *Memories* are corrupt as well as the other *Faculties* of the Soul, and therefore are more ready to let slip good things, and retain evil things: This however should not satisfie us in our forgetfulness of Divine Things; but rather beget in us a greater care of retaining them. The Apostle *Paul* calls upon us to *Give a very earnest heed unto the things which we hear, least at any time we should let them slip*,

ſhip, Heb. 2. 1. and the Apoſtle *James* charges us not to be *Forgetful Hearers of the Word*, Jam. 1. 25. 'Tis ſaid of *Mary*, that *ſhe kept the glad tidings of a Saviour*, Luk. 2. 19. Without ſomething of this retentive faculty, we cannot profit by the WORD Preached. If Food be not kept in the Stomach it nouriſhes not; and if the Spiritual Food of the Word be not retained, but loſt through forgetfulneſs, it will not nouriſh the Soul. If we go from a Sermon, and carry nothing at all of it away with us, but perfectly forget it, how is it poſſible it ſhould be of any uſe unto us?

DIRECTION IX.

Meditate upon what you have Heard, and Expoſtulate with your Souls about it. Dwell in your thoughts upon a Sermon: This is, as *Chewing the Cud*, which helps an eaſier Digeſtion, and more wholeſome nouriſhment. Ponder upon the great Truths which have been ſpoken unto you; this will be a Preaching over again a Sermon unto your own Souls; by doing of which, the Truths delivered will be more fixed in your memories, and your hearts affected anew, and a more laſting Impreſ-

ſion

son left upon them. 'Tis said of *Mary*, That *She Pondered those Sayings in her heart*, *Luk.* 2. 19. See then that you do after a Sermon, seriously consider of what has been said; by thus musing, your hearts will be Warmed a [illegible]. And in Meditating upon them, *Debate* with your hearts about them.

To help you here:

Suppose you had heard in a Sermon, That *Persons by neglecting Prayer, and the Lord's Supper, did greatly Sin against God, and wrong their own Souls.*

Now when you go Home, you should seriously ponder hereon, and Discourse your Souls about it after this manner: "Surely, What I have heard this Day is "true; I cannot Live Prayerless, I cannot "Live Supperless, without giving great of-"fence to God: while I live in the daily "neglect of those Duties, I live in a course "of daily provocation to God; nay, and "not only do I sin against God, but I also "wrong my own Soul infinitely. How "many a Blessing have I lost, by going so "seldome to the Throne of Grace, and "never at all to the Table of the Lord?

Again,

Again, Suppose you had heard in a Sermon, *That Christ is of all things the most Precious.* Then think with your selves, and say to this effect. "Verily, "Jesus Christ is the *Chief of ten thousand*; "he is the *Fairest of the Sons of men*; he "is *altogether Lovely*. In himself he is "the most excellent, but is he so to "me? Do I prize him more than any "Lust? more than the World? more "than Relations? more than life it self? "Do I so esteem him as to long to see "him face to face, and count it my "unhappiness to be absent from him?

Once more, Suppose you had heard in a Sermon, *That Indwelling Sin is a Believers greatest burden.* Then say, "Can "I affirm this concerning my self? Do "I groan more under the burden of in-"ward Corruption, then the burden of "outward affliction? Am I weary of "my life because of my lusts? Do I "*Long to be dissolved*, that I may to-"tally and eternally be delivered from "this body of Sin and Death? Is there "nothing which so troubles and grieves "me, as the experience of an indwelling

"principle

" principle of enmity against God, incli-
" nation to evil, and indisposition to that
" which is good?

Did we thus think and discourse with our selves about what we hear, how great an influence would the word of God in an ordinary way have upon us? 1 *Tim.* 4. 15. *Meditate upon these things, give thy self wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.* Jer. 15. 16. *Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoycing of mine heart, for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts.* Psal. 1. 2, 3. *But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*

DIRECTION. X.

Give God all the Glory of whatever Good you receive by the Word. Ascribe the praise of all good experienced unto God. Have you been any thing awakened, or convinced or reformed by the Word? If

so,

To render the praise to God alone: Have you been Savingly Converted or Sanctifyed by the Word? Give God all the Glory. Don't Sacrifice to your own Net; Don't set the *Crown* upon the head of *Instruments*, but upon the head of *Christ*. Ministers say in this case, *Not unto us, not unto us, but unto God be the Glory. Paul* may *Plant* and *Apollos Water*, but *'tis God that gives the increase*: They are no more than *Instruments*, 'tis God who is the *Efficient* of all Spiritual, Saving Good. To God alone you must Pray for a Blessing; and if you receive it, to God alone you must ascribe the Praise. If you thus Bless God, he will give you further cause to Bless him. A *thankful* receiver shall have more to be *thankful* for. The renouncing the power of *Moral Perswasions* of the Ministry, and the power of *Free Will* in our own natures, together with an acknowledging the *Sole efficiency of the Spirit of God* in our Salvation, is one of the most effectual courses for the obtaining Spiritual and Saving Good by the Word of God Preached. Say unto God, Lord! Ministers can do nothing, Ordinances can do nothing, I can do nothing in point of Saving Communications;

'Tis

'Tis thou that must do all, and all that has hitherto been done, 'tis thou that hast done it. Say thus humbly and seriously, and God will make thee to feel more of the power of His Spirit in the Ministry of His Word.

Consider what is said, and the Lord give you Understanding in all things, 2 *Tim.* 2.7.

FINIS.

Advertiſement.

THERE is now in the Preſs, and will ſpeedily be Publiſhed, A Diſcourſe concerning the Nature, and Power of the Holy Angels, and the great benefit which the True Fearers of God Receive by their Miniſtry, delivered in ſeveral Sermons: To which is added, A Sermon concerning the Sin and Miſery of the Fallen Angels: Alſo a Diſquiſition concerning Angelical Apparitions, in anſwer to a Caſe of Conſcience, ſhewing that Dæmons oft appear like Angels of Light, and what is the beſt and only way to prevent deception by them: All conſidered according to the Scripture, Reaſon, Experience, and approved Hiſtory. By the Reverend and Learned Mr. *Increaſe Mather*, Præſident of *Harvard Colledge* in *Cambridge*, in N.E.

There is alſo ready for the Preſs, *The Saints Victory and Triumph over Sin and Death*. As it was Recommended in a Sermon Preached to the Artillery Company at *Boſton*: On their Day for *Election of Officers*. By Mr. *Peter Thacher*, Paſtor of the Church of Chriſt in *Milton*.

Amen
Amen
Amen